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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: FAITH AND LANGUAGE NOT ENOUGH; GEORGIAN
IDENTITY POST ROSE-REVOLUTION

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) Summary. Georgian academics, artists and journalists gathered on June 18th at the Ambassador's residence to discuss the question of Georgian identity. Though specifically not intended to be a discussion of the current political situation, contemporary and historical politics were considered, with the consensus being that there is no contemporary civic identity in Georgia and that this is a fundamental hindrance in developing Georgia's democracy. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Comment. The quest to define the Georgian identity seems pulled between historical definitions and Georgia's role in the modern world. Georgian identity is viewed differently by those from Soviet and post-Soviet generations, and those with experience studying, working or traveling extensively abroad versus those who have not. The younger, more well-traveled segment of Georgian society appears to be pursuing the discussion of Georgian identity beyond what they view as a historical emphasis on ethnic, religious and geographical identity. To them geographical identity includes regions within Georgia, and whether someone is from Tbilisi or "the village." The older generation does not dispute the point that it is time to move beyond a linguistic, religious and ethnic identity, neither they nor the younger generation could point to specific contemporary figures or events as examples of components of modern Georgian identity. End comment.

LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

¶3. (U) One of the overarching themes of the discussion was a comparison with the West, and in particular the U.S. The idea that America has a diverse ethnic and religious population, but still has a cohesive identity, was used in comparison to Georgia which continues to dwell on ethnicity. The shared U.S. ideal that all are entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness regardless of background was put forth by Georgian journalist Shorena Shaverdashvili as an example of what Georgia lacks. Continuing focus on ethnic instead of national or civic identity was seen by all as an obstacle to the development of a modern democratic Georgian state. The lack of modern Georgian "national myths" was discussed, and the participants agreed that the Rose Revolution could have led to the creation of such a myth, but in the current political climate it is not viewed as such.

EDUCATION IS THE FUTURE

¶4. (U) Dr. Ketevan Kinturashvili, Professor of Art History at Tbilisi State University of Theater and Film, compared her teaching experience in the U.S. to her experience in Tbilisi, lamenting the lack of available textbooks and well-stocked libraries locally. Professor Giorgi Gogsadze of Tbilisi State University's Department of Human Geography suggested that modern civic values have not developed in Georgia. Mr. Tamaz Gamkrelidze, the President of the Georgian Academy of

Science put it differently, saying that the challenge for Georgians is preserving their historical identity based on faith and language while living in a globalized world. Multiple participants expressed that their or their students' travels abroad worked as a mirror on their own identities, and that increased opportunities for Georgians to travel, and especially to study, in other countries would help Georgians to better understand their place in the world.

OWNERSHIP OF IDEAS

15. (SBU) A constant theme throughout the discussion was the importance of Georgians feeling that changes in their society, be they cultural, legal or social, come from support within the country, and not be imposed from the outside. Andro Dgebuadze, Professor of Financial Management at the Caucasus School of Business, quipped that he "liked" being fined by the police because it showed progress of the rule of law. Participants agreed that the reduction in official corruption is a very positive development, but lamented that the current protracted protests have slowed additional reforms in recent months. The consensus was that though the West can be a positive influence on Georgia and Georgians in many ways, the way forward must be developed and executed by Georgians themselves.

16. (SBU) Participants in the lunch included:
Alexander Rondeli, President, Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies
Tamaz Gamkrelidze, President, Georgian Academy of Science
Ketevan Kintsurashvili, Professor, Tbilisi State University of Theater and Film

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Giorgi Godsadze, Head, Dept. of Human Geography, Tbilisi State University
Andro Dgebuadze, Professor, Caucasus School of Business
Giga Zedania, Professor, Ilia Chavchavadze University
Shorena Shaverdashvili, Editor in Chief, Hot Chocolate Magazine
TEFFT